

Voices in History

Anti-psychiatrists as practical historians



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1. Consulting room

Mary Even when I was working in (place) I asked my supervisor - 'cos she was dealing with the psychiatry people - do they exist, people that are causing this sickness? 'Cos I'm fully confident, fully satisfied now it's not the medication that makes me with all the symptoms. It's the those people that are after me.

Con yeah mm

Mary I feel sick an' everything. I blame them.

Con yeh well what do you think I think? (*smiling*)

Mary mm?

Con well I think you have an illness that's fairly well under control at the moment.

Source: McCabe, R., Leudar, I. and Antaki, C. (2004) .

‘On entering the smoking room where his girlfriend was sitting Simon heard a ‘voice of god’ which said *‘She is evil’*. He was very upset by this and afraid that his girlfriend might have overheard the voice.’

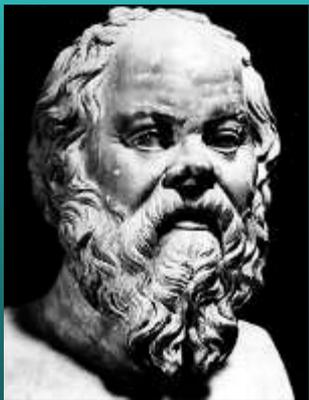
‘A few months following the death of her husband Ann was alone in her house thinking about him and missing him. She heard his voice telling her, *‘Don’t be stupid, it never was like that.’* and she had to agree, it never was.’

‘Lucy was on her own in her house and a bit upset. She heard a voice of an old family friend calling her name, *‘Lucy!’*. This took her back to past occasions when she talked with her friend about her problems. She found the experience reassuring.’

**What is the point in learning about
history of insanity in general
or specifically of hearing voices?**

Socrates (469-399 bce)

'Socrates ... happened to be making the ascent toward the Symbolon and the house of Andocides, putting some question to Euthyphron the while and sounding him out playfully. Suddenly he stopped short and fell silent, lost a good time in thought; at last he turned back, taking the way through the street of cabinet makers, and called out to the friends who had already gone onward to return, saying that his sign has come to him.' (Plutarch, OSS: 580d-e)



Source: Leudar, I and Thomas, P. (2000). The Sign of Socrates. In *Voices of Reason, Voices of Insanity*. London: Routledge. (chapter 1).

Historiography

History done for its own sake, to document, preserve and understand forms of life and their changes

In this respect, historical knowledge of insanity can be entertaining and intriguing – it is like taking a foreign holidays, it is fun. It may broaden our horizons or confirm our prejudices.

Done in this way, historical knowledge is not necessarily practically useful and it is not meant to be.

Practical Historians

Historical knowledge is used in current activities by scientists, mental health professionals and clients

1. *Uncritical uses* – historical knowledge constructed and used to shore up the status quo. For instance:

(a) ‘Whig historiography’ which focuses on the succession of theories and experiments that led to present-day psychiatry may be used to contrast past ignorance with contemporary sophistication.

(b) Retrospective psychiatry (projecting contemporary concepts onto the past possibly distorting it)

2. *Critical uses* – history used to explain and challenge current psychiatric conceptions and their status

(e.g. Challenge to the objectivity of psychiatric categories in DSM by Herb Kutchins and Stuart A. Kirk: *The Selling of DSM: The Rhetoric of Science in Psychiatry* (Aldine de Gruyter, 1992) and *Making Us Crazy: DSM: The Psychiatric Bible and the Creation of Mental Disorders* (Free Press, 1997).

Psychology as a natural vs. human science

1. Natural Science

- **Psychology is a natural science.**
- **Its aim is to explain human behaviours and experiences rather than to understand them.**
- **The explanations of such behaviours and experiences are to be scientific and objective (in practice this means physicalist, hence the current obsession with brains).**
- **Such explanations ignore meanings of actions and replace them by objective causes (e.g. faulty reality testing, neurological problems).**
- **Ordinary accounts of behaviours and experiences are un- and pre-scientific and thus inadequate.**
- **The scientific explanations are meant to substitute for ordinary accounts people have of what they do in everyday life**

Psychiatry as a natural vs. human science

2. Human science

- **Psychology cannot ignore meaning, otherwise it is not explaining what it should be explaining.**
- **Even so, psychology can provide rigorous and explicit descriptions and analyses of what allows people to act meaningfully and to account for their meaningful actions.**
- **Psychologists must pay attention to ecological, cultural and historical variations in meaningful human experience.**

Anti-psychiatrists as practical historians

- **Michel Foucault**
- **Thomas Szasz**
- **Ervin Goffman**
- **R.D. Laing**

Anti-psychiatrists as practical historians

Michel Foucault – genealogy of ‘mental illness’

Exclusion, Confinement, Asylum

- Leprosy disappeared, the leper vanished, or almost, from memory; these structures remained. Often in these same places the formulas of exclusion would be repeated, strangely similar two or three centuries later. Poor, vagabonds, criminals and “deranged minds would take the part played by the leper.
- What doubtless remained longer than leprosy, and would persist when the lazar houses had been empty for years, were the values and images attached to the figure of leper as well as the meaning of his exclusion, the social significance of that insistent and fearful figure.
- 'To inhabit the reaches long since abandoned by lepers, they chose a group that to our eyes is strangely mixed and confused. But what is for us merely an undifferentiated sensibility must have been for those living in classical age a clearly articulated perception. It is this mode of perception which we must investigate in order to discover the form of sensibility to madness in that epoch'.

Anti-psychiatrists as practical historians

Michel Foucault – genealogy of ‘mental illness’

Medicalization of unreason

'all those forms of unreason which had replaced leprosy in the geography of evil, and which had been banished into the remotest social distance, now became visible leprosy. ... Unreason was once more present, but marked now by an imaginary stigma of disease, which added to its powers of terror'.

'Thus it is in the realm of the fantastic and not within the rigour of medical thought that unreason joins illness and draws closer to it.' (MC1, p. 205)

'Homo medicus was not called into the world of confinement as an arbiter, to divide what was crime from what was madness, what was evil from what was illness, but rather as a guardian, to protect others from the vague danger that exuded through the walls of confinement'. (p. 205)

'The doctor came, once the conversion of images was effected, the disease having already assumed the ambiguous aspects of fermentation, of corruption, of tainted exhalation, of decomposed flesh. What is traditionally called 'progress' towards madness' attaining a medical status was in fact made possible only by strange regression' (p. 206)

Anti-psychiatrists as practical historians Michel Foucault – genealogy of ‘mental illness’

Individualisation/psychologisation of madness

'liberation of the insane, abolition of constraint, constitution of human milieu – these are only justifications. The real operations were very different. Tuke created an asylum where he substituted for the free terror of madness the stifling anguish of responsibility; fear no longer rained on the other side of prison gates, it now ranged under the seals of consciousness. ... the asylum no longer punished madman's guilt, it is true; but it did more, it organized that guilt, it organized it for the madman as a consciousness of himself, and as a non-reciprocal relationship to the keeper; it organized it for the man of reason as an awareness of the Other, a therapeutic intervention in the mad. Henceforth, more genuinely confined than he could have been in a dungeon and chains, a prisoner of nothing but himself, the sufferer was caught in a relation to himself that was of the order of transgression, and in order to others that was of the order of shame. The others are made innocent, they are no longer persecutors; the guilt is shifted inside'

Anti-psychiatrists as practical historians

Thomas Szasz

- There is no such thing as 'Mental Illness'.
- 'Symptoms' of 'mental illnesses' are 'personal problems of living'.
- Psychiatry effects 'transubstantiation of personal and social problems into medical diseases.'
- Instead of explaining actions in terms of aims and goals, it accounts for it in terms of causes and compulsions
- Psychiatry withholds moral agency from psychiatric patients - 'when we are culturally developed, we treat agents as objects'
- Psychiatrists are not therapeutic but corrective agents

Source: Szasz, T. (1987) *Insanity*, CUP.

Anti-psychiatrists as practical historians

Thomas Szasz on history of epilepsy

Epileptic neurosis may exist for a considerable period in an undeveloped or masked form, showing itself not by convulsions, but by periodic attacks of mania, or by manifestations of extreme moral perversion. ... Epileptic neurosis is certainly most closely allied to the insane neurosis ... A character which the insane neurosis has in common with epileptic is that it is apt to burst out into convulsive explosion of violence (Maudsley, 1873)

Maudsley is describing a moral conflict: a person is torn between committing suicide or homicide or not committing these acts. He simply identifies the option he approves as sane and the other as insane, and then introduces the idea of irresistible impulse, which he claims represents the scientifically correct understanding of the old theological concept of diabolical possession. That the evil temptation and diabolical possession of the theologians has simply been renamed the morbid impulse of the psychiatrist finds support in the fact that each of these terms is applied only disapproved options or acts. (Thomas Szasz, *Insanity*, 1990, pp. 240-241

Anti-psychiatrists as practical historians

Thomas Szasz

- 'Between attacks the frank epileptic is usually a constitutional psychopath of the most disagreeable sort.' (CC, p. 59)
- Epileptics were segregated in epileptic colonies and these were not therapeutic communities. Their aim was to protect the society, because epileptics were dangerous to others, 'guilty of homicide and other revolting crimes'. The colonies were means whereby relatives could get rid of their charges (CC, p. 48)
- 'The disease ... is the same but social policies were very different indeed'. (CC, p. 59). Epilepsy is not any further associated with violence and it does not require segregation.'
- All this changed when epilepsy was understood as a neurological condition
- 'Of course people with epilepsy sometimes become violent, just as people without epilepsy sometimes do.' (A neurologist quoted in CC, p. 60-61)

Anti-psychiatrists as practical historians

Ervin Goffman on Asylums

- 'In psychiatry there is a formal effort to act as if the issue is treatment, not moral judgement, but this is not consistently maintained. Ethical neutrality is indeed difficult to sustain in psychiatry, because the patient's disorder is intrinsically related to his acting in a way that causes offence to witnesses' (A, p. 318)
- in the actual management of patients, ideals of proper conduct must be held up as desirable, infractions inveighed against, and the patient treated as a 'responsible' person.'
- a network of institutions designed to provide a residence for various categories of socially troublesome people. These institutions include nursing homes, general hospitals, veteran's homes, jails, geriatric clinics, homes for mentally retarded, work farms, orphanages, and old folks homes.' (A, 309)
- Patients in asylums have a career rather than receive treatment. This career consists in transformation of the self to accord with the demands of the total institution. Goffman documents adjustment to institution which takes place over time, and is monitored by a variety of institutional devices, e.g. Patient records.
- Patient records make privacy and concealment, so important for autonomous self difficult. Records perform 'disclosive work'. The hospital as an institution systematically but selectively bares the person's self.

Cases studies in historical psychology of hearing voices

- **The Iliad, Theogony**
- **Socrates**
- **Theresa of Avilla**
- **John Bunyan**
- **Daniel Schreber**

Theogony by Hesiod (800 bce?)

And one day they taught Hesiod glorious song while he was shepherding his lambs under holy Helicon, and this word first the goddesses *said to me* -- the Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus who holds the aegis:

(ll. 26-28) 'Shepherds of the wilderness, wretched things of shame, mere bellies, we know how to speak many false things as though they were true; but we know, when we will, to utter true things.'

(ll. 29-35) So said the ready-voiced daughters of great Zeus, and they plucked and gave me a rod, a shoot of sturdy laurel, a marvelous thing, and breathed into me a divine voice to celebrate things that shall be and things there were aforetime; and they bade me sing of the race of the blessed gods that are eternally, but ever to sing of themselves both first and last. But why all this about oak or stone?

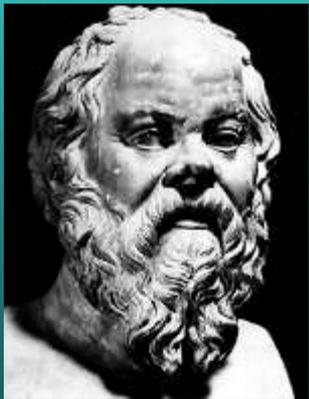
(ll. 36-52) Come thou, let us begin with the Muses who gladden the great spirit of their father Zeus in Olympus with their songs, telling of things that are and that shall be and that were aforetime with consenting voice.



<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm>

Socrates (469-399 bce)

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Source: Leudar, I and Thomas, P. (2000). The Sign of Socrates. In *Voices of Reason, Voices of Insanity*. London: Routledge. (chapter 1).

"but whereas some men actually have this sort of apprehension in dreams, hearing better asleep, when the body is quiet and undisturbed, while when they are awake their soul can hear higher powers but faintly, and moreover, as they are overwhelmed by the tumult of their passions and the distractions of their wants, they cannot listen or attend to the message' (Plutarch, OSS: 588d).

'Socrates, on the other hand, had an understanding which, being pure and free from passion, and commingling with the body but little, for necessary ends, was so sensitive and delicate as to respond at once to what reached him' (Plutarch, OSS: 588d-e).

Source: Leudar, I and Thomas, P. (2000). The Sign of Socrates. In *Voices of Reason, Voices of Insanity*. London: Routledge. (chapter 1).

'Socrates is guilty of corrupting the minds of the young, and of believing in supernatural things of his own invention instead of the gods recognized by the State' (Plato, Apology, 24bc).

Source: Leudar, I and Thomas, P. (2000). The Sign of Socrates. In *Voices of Reason, Voices of Insanity*. London: Routledge. (chapter 1).

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Theresa of Avilla (1515-1582)

“Like imperfect sleep which, instead of giving more strength to the head, doth but leave it more exhausted, the result of *mere operations of imagination* is but to weaken the soul. Instead of nourishment and energy she reaps only lassitude and disgust: whereas *a genuine heavenly vision* yields to her a harvest of ineffable riches, and an admirable renewal of bodily strength. I alleged these reasons to those who so often accused my visions of being *the work of the enemy of mankind* and *the sport of my imagination.*”



Sources: Teresa of Avila, *Autobiography*, 1911, p. xxvii;
Leudar, I. (2001).

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

‘But the same day, as I was in the midst of a game of Cat, and having struck one blow from the hole; just as I was about to strike it second time, a voice did suddenly dart from Heaven into my Soul, which said *‘Wilt thou leave thy sins, and go to Heaven? Or have thy sins, and go to Hell?’* At this I was put to an exceeding maze; wherefore leaving my cat upon the ground, I looked up to heaven, and it was as if I had with the eyes of my understanding, seen the Lord Jesus looking down at me, as being hotly displeased with me, and as if he did severely threaten me with some grievous punishment for these, and other my ungodly practices’



Sources: §22, John Bunyan, 1666, *Grace Abounding to the greatest of sinners*; Leudar, I. and Sharrock, W. (2002). The cases of John Bunyan. Part 1: Taine and Royce; Part 2: James and Janet. *History and Psychiatry*, 13, 4, 401-417 & 13, 3, 247-265 respectively.

Daniel Paul Schreber (1842-1911)

During the night—and as far as I can remember in one *single* night—the lower God (Ariman) appeared. The radiant picture of his rays became visible to my inner eye (compare footnote 61), while I was lying in bed not sleeping but awake—that is to say he was reflected on my inner nervous system. Simultaneously I heard his voice; but it was not a soft whisper—as the talk of the voices always was before and after that time—it resounded in a mighty bass as if directly in front of my bedroom windows. The impression was so intense, so that anybody not hardened to terrifying miraculous impressions as I was, would have been shaken to the core. Also *what* was spoken did not sound friendly by any means: everything seemed calculated to instil fright and terror into me and the word “wretch” was frequently heard—an expression quite common in the basic language to denote a human being destined to be destroyed by God and to feel God’s power and wrath. Yet everything that was spoken was *genuine*, not phrases learnt by rote as they later were, but the immediate expression of a true feeling.



Schreber, D.P. (1903/1955). *Memoirs of my mental illness*.
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press

5. Meaning of Voices

- **Voices are meaningful to those who experience them.**
 - **In everyday life treating them as meaningless symptoms constitutes an accomplishment!**
- **They are not private and idiosyncratic experiences.**
 - **Whilst only the voice hearer may experience a voice as it happens, in broader sense voices are situated in the world and shared as any experience. Other experiences can be just like that.**
- **Since voices talk, what meanings they convey and how they do so can be documented and analysed just as in more ordinary talk.**
- **Voice talk is of course not necessarily altogether ordinary (e.g. some elements only of ordinary speech may be preserved in a voice)**

7. Elements of Voice Meaning

• Linguistic elements

- phonology, prosody, lexicon, syntax, semantics

• Pragmatics

- **Voices tend to regulate and evaluate voice hearer 's activities.**
- **Voices tend to be focused on the voice hearer rather than directed into the world.**
- **Voices are not impulsions but tend to provide reasons for doing or not doing things.**
- **Unlike ordinary talk, voices tend not to be not reflexive.**

Sources: Leudar, I., Thomas, P., McNally, D. and Glinski, A. (1997)
and Leudar, I. and Thomas, P. (2000), chapter 9.

8. Voice-talk in settings

- The meaning of voices is not exhausted by their linguistic or pragmatic analysis.
- The voices are experienced in settings.
- Such settings may extend from the immediate *here-and-now* to more extensive biographic space.
- Settings are not available in advance but are created for specific voice experiences.
- In accounting for voices, voice hearers make use of social, religious medical and cultural *semiotic resources* (or ‘grand narratives’, perhaps?)

Leudar, I., Sharrock, W., Hayes, J. and Truckle, S. (2008).

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